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ABSTRACT

Current family relationships not only form an important part of most people's social networks but also influence global perceptions of social support. Using multiple regression techniques, this study investigated the roles of students' perceptions of their family environment and the quality of specific student-parent relationships in predicting students' adjustment and generalized perceptions of social support. Undergraduate students (N=98) completed the Family Environment Scale, Social Support Questionnaire, Quality of Relationships Inventory concerning their current relationships with their mothers and fathers, and the Beck Depression Survey and UCLA Loneliness Questionnaire. Findings revealed a strong relationship between the students' general perceptions of family cohesiveness, conflict, and expressiveness and perceptions of depth, support, and conflict from each parent. Specific relationship-based measures made independent contributions to the prediction of loneliness, depression, and global social support, but family environment measures only made unique predictions of depression. The findings provide support for the idea that perceptions of specific close relationships are an important component in adjustment and overall perceptions of social relationships and suggest that overall perceptions of family environments may also be important at least in some aspects of adjustment. (Author/NB)

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Family Environments, Specific Relationships, and General Perceptions of Adjustment

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Family Environments, Specific Relationships, and General Perceptions of Adjustment

Current family relationships (1) form an important part of most people's social networks, and (2) influence global perceptions of social support. Using multiple regression techniques this study investigated the roles of students' perceptions of their family environment and the quality of specific student-parent relationships in predicting student's adjustment and generalized perceptions of social support. Using 98 undergraduate students as subjects, the results showed a) a strong relationship between the students' general perceptions of family cohesiveness, conflict and expressiveness and perceptions of depth, support and conflict from each parent, and b) that specific-relationship based measures made independent contributions to the prediction of loneliness, depression and global social support, but family environment measures only made unique predictions of depression. The study not only provides support for the idea that perceptions of specific close relationships are an important component in adjustment and overall perceptions of social relationships, but that in addition overall perceptions of family environments may also be important at least in some aspects of adjustment.

Current family relationships form an important part of most people's social networks, in addition to their role in the creation of perceptions of social support (Procidiano & Heller, 1983). These relationships develop and are maintained over significant periods of time, and are likely to have well defined supportive and conflictual aspects. For most people and particularly for college age students, the family is an important source of support, the quality of which has been found to be predictive of personal adjustment. Perceived support from one's family could conceivably come from two domains of interactions, from the specific relationships one has with particular family members and/or from an overall perception of a family environment-- a cognitive amalgam of the specific interactions among the coexisting members of a family unit .

A large body of research has focussed both on the general perceptions of available support, and also on specific support from parents, friends and romantic partners (Cutrona, 1989; Pierce, Sarason & Sarason, 1991; Procidano & Heller, 1983). Recently that some emphasis has been placed on the different family environments experienced by siblings growing up in the same family (Daniels & Plomin, 1985; McCartney, Harris & Bernieni, 1990). However the potential influence of the overall family environment versus the environment created by

specific intra-familial relationships on the adjustment of the child has yet to be adequately examined.

The study reported here had two purposes: a) to investigate the extent to which the perception of the family environment is associated with the quality of the student-parent relationship and with aspects of the student's perceived social support, and b) to ascertain whether measures of specific student-parent relationships and the student's perceptions of the family environment both contribute to predictions of student's perceived support and adjustment.

Ninety-eight undergraduate students completed questionnaires which assessed: (a) the perceptions of their family environment (Family Environment Scale), (b) Global perceptions of social support (Social Support Questionnaire), (c) the quality of their current relationships with their mothers and fathers (Quality of Relationships Inventory), and (d) personal adjustment (Beck Depression Survey, UCLA Loneliness Questionnaire).

For this study general family relationships were represented by the three FES Relationship subscales: Cohesion (degree of commitment, help and support family members provide for each other), Conflict (amount of openly expressed anger, aggressiveness and conflict among family members), and Expressiveness (extent to which family members are encouraged to act openly and express feelings directly). Specific family relationships were assessed by the QRI Support (extent to which the subject can count on the person for assistance) and Conflict (the degree to which the relationship is also a source of interpersonal distress) scales.

First, we investigated the associations between the FES and the QRI for the students' relationships with each parent. The QRI support scales for the relationships with the mother and father showed strong to moderate associations with the students' perceptions of the cohesion and degree of expressiveness in the family environment. This was illustrated by the correlations between QRI Support (Student/Father and Student/Mother) with the FES Cohesion scale ($r = .59$, $p < 0.01$; $r = .58$, $p < 0.01$), and FES Expressiveness ($r = .47, p < 0.01$; $r = .44, p < 0.01$). Student FES Conflict also showed a significant correlation with QRI Conflict Student/father ($r = .33$, $p < 0.01$) and QRI Conflict Student-Mother ($r = .44$, $p < 0.01$) [See Table 1.].

Next we compared the contribution of the QRI Scales to that of the FES scales in predicting student's adjustment. Two sets of multiple regression analyses were performed using the three FES scales and the Student/Mother, Student/Father QRI Conflict and Support scales, as independent variables. The result demonstrated that despite their correlations with the each other, both the FES and the QRI measures for a single target made unique contributions to the predictions of both measures of adjustment when the FES data was entered first. For example, for student loneliness the QRI predicted a further 20% of the variance [$F(7,90) = 6.96$, $p < .001$] after the FES predicted 14%. For student depression scores, the QRI predicted a further 8% of the variance [$F(7,90) = 7.507$, $p < .001$], after the FES scales accounted for 29 % of the variance. In the second set of equations the QRI was entered first. The FES subscale group then made significant contributions of variance to depression, [$F(7,90) = 7.507$), $p < .001$], but not to loneliness. [See Figure 1.].

A similar pattern of results were found when social support scores were the dependent measures, and FES and QRI scales were the independent variables. When the three FES scales were entered first, the QRI and FES scales each predicted significant variance for satisfaction (SSQS) and support availability (SSQN). For SSQS, the QRI predicted a further 27% of the variance [$F(7,90) = 7.480$, $p < .001$] after the FES predicted 9% of the variance. For SSQN, the QRI predicted a further 18% of the variance [($F(7,90) = 4.416$, $p < .001$], after the FES predicted 7% (ns.). When the QRI scales were entered first, the FES subscales did not make significant contributions to predictions of social support. [See Figure 2.].

The results of the study suggest that both the FES relationship scales and the QRI support and conflict scales measure similar dimensions of intra-familial and interpersonal relationships, and also relate meaningfully to other constructs including perceived social support, and personal adjustment. The findings elucidate a need for the consideration of family environments in the prediction of depression, while providing support for the notion that perception of special close relationships are an important component of schemas regarding social relationships in general.

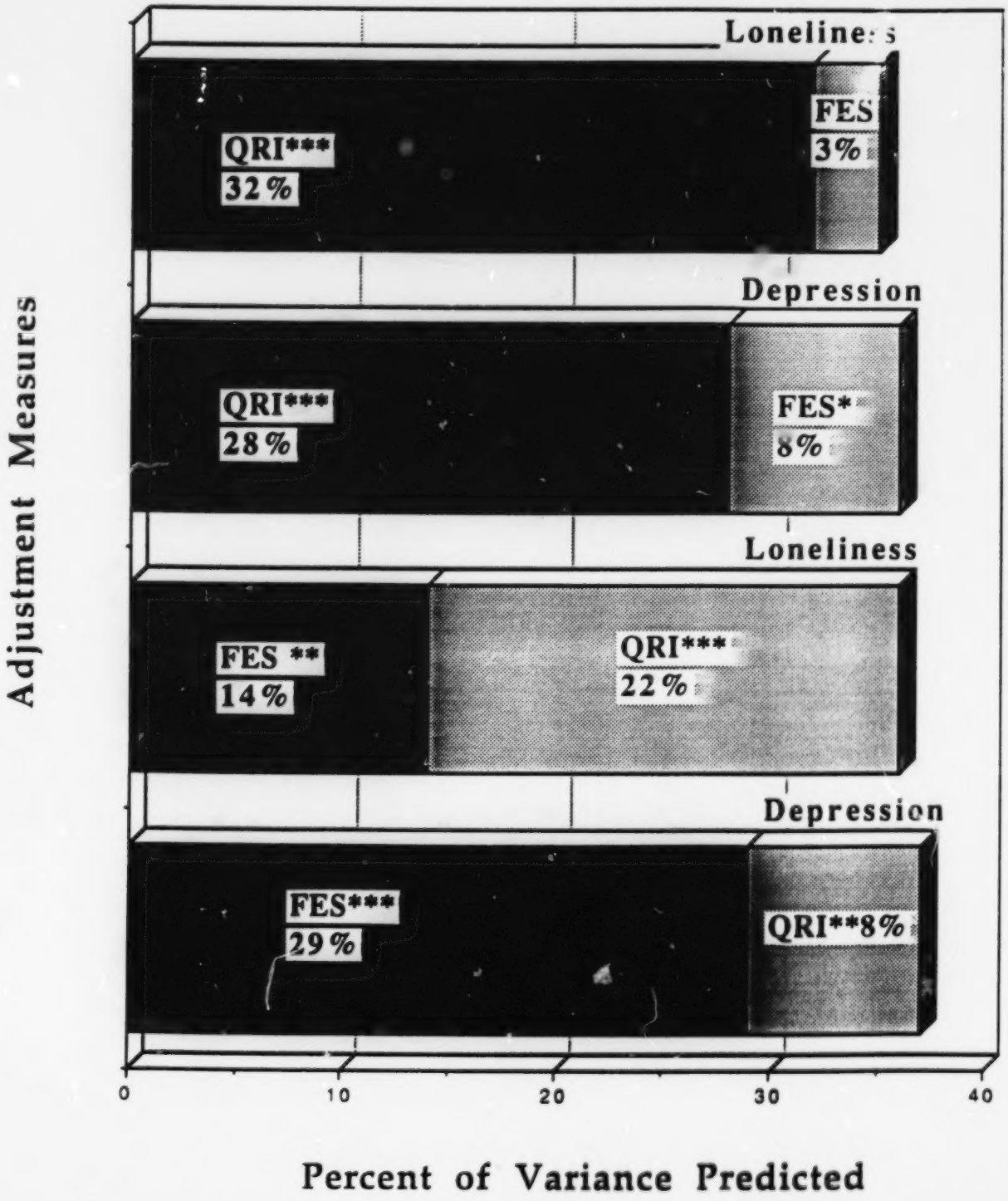
Table 1

Correlations of Student Quality of Relationship Scores with Family Environment Scores.

	FES Cohesion	FES Expressiveness	FES Conflict
QRI SUPPORT (Father)	.59**	.47**	-.35**
QRI SUPPORT (Mother)	.58**	.44**	-.32**
QRI CONFLICT (Father)	-.33**	-.39**	.33**
QRI CONFLICT (Mother)	-.44**	-.40**	.44**

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Figure 1.
Hierarchical Multiple regression analysis predicting adjustment



* p <.05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Figure 2.

Hierarchical multiple regression analysis predicting global support.